

P 281419Z JAN 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9149  
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 000057

STATE FOR EUR/CE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KJUS](#) [RO](#)

SUBJECT: SENATE PRESIDENT MIRCEA GEOANA: MY CONSTITUTIONAL  
VISION IS BIGGER THAN BASESCU'S

REF: BUCHAREST 0055

Classified By: CDA JERI GUTHRIE-CORN FOR 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Romanian Senate President Mircea Geoana said that he wanted to visit the United States at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the new Administration gets to "see us, hear the message from Bucharest, and remain focused on Romania and the region." Geoana added that he was also organizing an Aspen Institute event in late February and hoped that senior USG policymakers might attend. He argued against retention of chief Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Daniel Morar, and warned that the debate over extending his tenure was part of a "political game." He was upbeat on how the new PDL-PSD coalition was working out, but acknowledged that the two sides parted ways over President Basescu's intention to launch a constitutional reform initiative by year's end. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During a January 27 meeting with Charge and Polcouns, PSD Senate President Mircea Geoana referred to his unsuccessful efforts to attend the inaugural ceremonies in Washington and reiterated that he wanted to visit the United States at the earliest opportunity. Geoana said that it was critical for Romania to engage the new U.S. Administration early to ensure that "they see us, hear the message from Bucharest, and remain focused on Romania and the region." Geoana said that he had already begun lobbying USG contacts for an early visit and asked for the Embassy's support.

¶3. (C) Geoana added that--under his hat as head of the Romanian branch of the Aspen Institute--he was organizing a "small select group" for a "quiet retreat" of policymakers in Romania February 25-26 to discuss regional economic and financial strategies along with a strategic overview. He said that he had invited former Secretary of State Albright to the event and said that he was interested in participation from the new Administration as well.

¶4. (C) Charge replied that the Embassy was looking for ways to continue the high-level bilateral dialogue, noting the upcoming visit of EUR DAS Bryza. She added that we were hoping to respond positively to Prosecutor General Laura Kovesi's request for a high-level USG delegation to the Romanian-hosted conference of Prosecutors Generals and Attorneys Generals in March. When Charge remarked on the good work that Kovesi and Chief Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Daniel Morar were doing, Geoana replied: "I don't know the chap (Morar) and he may be doing a good job, but in principle I don't want to see him extended."

¶5. (C) Geoana explained: "I was behind the idea of importing the Spanish model for anti-corruption. The basic principle is to bring in smart, honest prosecutors and police from humble backgrounds from small cities to do the job of cleaning up corruption in the capital. But they should not stay too long, because they become part of the establishment; it's not healthy to keep prosecutors in the same job forever. He added that Romania needed another "Guevara" to shake things up. Geoana also warned that there was a "political game" behind the Morar reappointment debate, noting that Justice Minister Predoiu during his first term with the Tariceanu cabinet had opposed Morar's extension but had

changed his tune when he was retained in the new government. He concluded: "We should keep Morar only until after the EU's next monitoring report, and hold him accountable for that."

¶16. (C) Asked by the Charge as to how the new PDL-PSD coalition was working out, Geoana responded that despite "small missteps" at the beginning--the atmosphere in the coalition was "pretty good, excellent." He acknowledged that there was a public perception that the real movers and shakers were outside of the cabinet, admitting that "it doesn't look good for the Prime Minister to have so many bosses. It's like that old song, 'Every Move You Make...I'll Be Watching You'." He insisted, however, that the interests of the parties and government were consonant: "if the government is doing well, I'm doing well" he concluded.

¶17. (C) To a query from Polcouns as to how the Boc government might harness its 70 percent majority in parliament and what the major initiatives might be, Geoana responded: "Towards reforming Romania, of course. My vision is bigger than Basescu's. We need to look at all of the big questions: how far to decentralize, how to extend the efficiency of essential public services like health care and education, and raising the mediocre--even criminal--output of the public sector." Geoana added that his goal was to "disturb the status quo, using the economic crisis as a pretext to really do something."

¶18. (C) Geoana contrasted his approach to constitutional reform with that of President Basescu, insisting that "Basescu's approach is simplistic and politicized, even personal. His approach to reforming the constitution is a result of his bad experience with Tariceanu as Prime Minister, and there's a suspicion that he's fixing the constitution to fix a new mandate for himself and to make himself boss of the universe." In contrast, he said, "I'm looking to establish a new rule of continuity in trans-political cycle projects and to modernize Romania in an integrated and predictable way over the next twelve to twenty years." Geoana added that he hoped the USG could provide expertise in helping Romania to adopt a multi-year budgeting process as part of this reform process.

¶19. (C) Charge in closing brought a couple of legislative matters to Geoana's attention. She noted growing concern among USG law enforcement agencies--FBI, DEA, Secret Service--and their Romanian counterparts over Romania's recent adoption of a new EU-inspired data retention directive. This draft law--Law 298--was even more draconian than EU norms and threatened to disrupt the excellent bilateral law enforcement cooperation that we now enjoyed. She and Polcouns also raised concerns over reports that Parliament had recently revived a draft restitution law (reftel) that would mandate handing the majority of Greek Catholic churches and other properties to the majority Romanian Orthodox Church. Geoana replied that he had discussed Law 298 already with President Basescu and that they shared our concerns. The way forward, he said, was to refer Law 298 to a legal and professional panel to obtain their opinions on the potential impact of the law. Geoana also took on board our concerns regarding the restitution law and said he would discuss the matter with his counterpart in the Chamber of Deputies.

¶10. (C) Comment: We pushed back hard when Geoana insisted that DNA Anti-Corruption Prosecutor Morar had to go, but it is clear that Geoana is under pressure from many in his party (including former Prime Minister Nastase) who fear the reach of the DNA. Geoana's "bigger vision" for constitutional and institutional reform appears to reflect the electoral timetable, as a more ambitious reform strategy would move the timetable for reform beyond the year-end Presidential election here in Romania. Senior Cotroceni contacts have confirmed to us that President Basescu's game plan is to combine the election with a national referendum on constitutional reform, as a way to increase voter interest in the election and to boost his re-election prospects. Geoana's interest in an early visit to the United States

underscores that he sees himself not so much as the head of the Romanian Senate, but rather as a co-Prime Minister or perhaps as a Deputy President. It was telling that we ran into Foreign Minister Diaconescu in the waiting room just prior to our meeting with Geoana. FM Diaconescu was--literally--fresh off the plane from a trip to Brussels for the GAERC and soon off to Madrid for a bilateral meeting, and had obviously rushed to Geoana's office to provide a readout, and perhaps to obtain instructions. We will have to move carefully in choreographing Geoana's request for an early high-level meeting with senior USG interlocutors, given that President Basescu clearly desires the same thing for himself. End Comment.

GUTHRIE-CORN